

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL PHILLIP SMITH, COMMANDER  
AFGHAN REGIONAL SECURITY ADVISORY COMMAND - CENTRAL SUBJECT: OPERATIONAL UPDATE  
ON OPERATIONS IN CENTRAL AFGHANISTAN AND AFGHAN SECURITY MODERATOR: CHARLES J.  
"JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF  
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COL. SMITH: I command the adviser group that advises the Afghan 201st,  
Selab, Central Corps -- and the Central Region Police command -- in an AOR that  
is in the central region of Afghanistan that includes Kabal. 10 other  
Provinces, 12 (million), 13 million people, in 300 or so districts, which  
accounts for about half the population of Afghanistan.

There are several organizations in ISAF that are tasked with the  
building, training and development of the ANSF: CSTCA, the program designers,  
those who create fielding plans; CJTF Phoenix, who sources and supports the  
trainers, advisers, the implementers, the integrators of the plans and the guys  
who validate and assess the progress and readiness of the Army and police.  
Underneath CJTF Phoenix there are five Regional Adviser commands for the  
police and army, of which I command one.

The five regional commanders, U.S., and coalition, are the military  
forces whose principal task is to conduct COIN operations that delegitimize the  
TB, ACM and attempt to provide legitimacy and attempt to provide legitimacy to  
the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan by fighting alongside the Afghan forces.

The greatest challenge that I have observed in working with the Afghan  
National Security Forces is not their fighting capability, it's not their  
desire to create a national army and police, it's not their willingness to  
sacrifice. Rather it is the creation and sustainment of a national industrial  
base from which to maintain the army and the police, in the form of logistics,  
transportation, communications and maintenance of the equipment and weapons and  
vehicles and aircraft.

And as you know, creating a security force during peacetime is  
difficult enough. Trying to create it from nothing during combat, and fighting  
it requires even more patience, diligence, money, discipline, long-term vision  
and communications.

The adviser's principal task is to advice, select Afghan leadership and  
units on leadership, training and fighting skills. Advisers also have to  
coordinate and integrate the plans that CSTCA comes up with. And then we embed  
inside the Afghan National Security Forces, either when partnered with a  
coalition force, or when they do operations by themselves to provide access to  
those capabilities that the Afghan National Security forces do not yet possess -  
- things like aviation, Medevac support, medical support, fire support,

artillery and logistics sustainment. The Afghans do have an ability to re-supply and provide basic maintenance and employ some minimal artillery and mortars, and our task is to enhance that ability, improve it, and put systems in place so that the Afghans can eventually sustain themselves.

Finally, we as advisers have a responsibility to do the initial evaluation and assessment on the status of the readiness and development of the Afghan National Security Forces across the functional components -- leadership, personnel, command and control, logistics, intelligence, operations and training.

The adviser command is joint, its coalition. My command consists of over 900 Army National Guard, Air Force, Navy, Marine, both active duty and reserve, civilian, French, Romanian, German, soon to be Portuguese folks. I have three different chains of command that I work inside of. I work with ISAF and the coalition force, regional commanders, the Afghan Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior, and my staff coordinates, integrates and cooperates with eight different higher and adjacent commands in an effort to integrate all of these activities with the police and the army. One of the difficulties that we have here is that, as an advisor command, it's not necessarily organized nor sourced to conduct all this integration and coordination. And we have had to reorganize, task organize and cross level across our organization several times in order to make sure we have the right people in place to both provide advice to the police and to the army and then also to do the integration and coordination that we have to with our higher headquarters.

Just a couple of notes about things that I've also observed while being here in Afghanistan since March. I think the Afghan people are tired of fighting, and perhaps become just a little bit impatient with our impatience. In other words, we are trying to push them towards a capability that they may or may not necessarily want to accept.

We have learned that to be effective advisers, we first must gain an understanding of how the Afghans think. They do have a system in place. They have been able to conduct warfare over the past 30 years. And we have to understand that they are not going to unlearn a lot of things in a very short period of time. It will take time to introduce them to different, improved techniques that lead them to be able to better sustain themselves.

The nature of the fight here from what I see as an adviser is a simple insurgency as compared to what we all know is going on in Iraq. The objective of any insurgency, whether it's simple or complex is always the people -- the citizens of Afghanistan, not the guy who's shooting at us. Not the guy who's terrorizing. It really takes a lot of discipline to stay focused on the people of Afghanistan.

American forces perhaps focus too much on the physical fight than on the long-term approach to established governance and security needed to firmly implant the government. And of course you know governance can be either imposed or it can be willingly accepted and sustained.

That completes my statement. I'm standing by for any questions that you all might have.

MR. HOLT: All right sir, thank you very much.

And I want to make sure I got your title correct. Colonel Phillip Smith, you're Commander of the Afghan Regional Security Advisory Command Central. Is that correct sir?

COL. SMITH: That's correct. There's five of them. Central refers to the central region of Afghanistan, so I'm not going to be able to answer many questions that pertain to other regions other than the central region here.

MR. HOLT: All right sir. And gentleman, as we go through the questions, please state your name and your publication. And, Andrew, you were first online, so why don't you get us started.

Q Great, thanks.

Colonel, Andrew Lubin. Good to talk to you again, sir.

COL. SMITH: Andy, good to hear from you. How you been?

Q Good thanks. Keeping real busy. And we appreciate you getting up at zero dark to speak with us. That's -- what do you have, 0:04 out there right now?

COL. SMITH: Yes. No problems though Andy.

Q Good, appreciate that. Colonel, with the logistics and transportation, a lot of this is common sense -- you know, thinking a week, a month or a day ahead. Is this something that the Afghans are going to have a problem getting reused to? I mean they've been at war for almost 40 years, and educationally, they're way behind the times. Is this something you can teach them quickly, or is it going to be another x-many years before they catch on?

COL. SMITH: You're right Andy, they been fighting for awhile. But from what I understand, in my short studies of how they have fought, they are very good individual soldiers. They come together occasionally for small group fights. However, they have never been able to logistically sustain themselves apart from what they can take from the people, villages and so on and so forth. So from a modern army perspective, they do not have in their background or in their experience an ability to think about long-term logistics sustainment, and it is something that we have been working with them, it is one of our principal major objectives in order to get them to, not only think about, but also to provide them the equipment whereby where they can actually do it.

Q Great, thanks. How is the NCO Corps? Are they getting stronger -- I mean, that's based on the old Russian system; the NCOs were not the top of the list.

COL. SMITH: That's correct. As you know, the army is based -- many of the officers that we deal with are -- were trained in Soviet-bloc countries. And that's part of the reason why they do not consider, do not put much faith, trust and confidence in their NCO Corps.

It's coming along slowly, but it is coming along. It, again, is one of our major objectives because we understand that in a -- an effective fighting force, a commander has to be able to trust and have confidence in all of his subordinates. And, most importantly, we consider the NCOs and the enlisted troop much able and have to be able to fight. Q Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Dave?

Q Hi Colonel Smith. Dave Dilegge from --

COL. SMITH: Hey Dave. How are you doing?

Q Pretty good. How are you doing? I want to wish you a happy belated 232nd birthday from another 32 alumni; I saw that you had 32 a while back.

COL. SMITH: I did. I was very fortunate to command the Bayshield Bastards. One of -- the greatest two years of my life, quite frankly.

Q Outstanding. I also spent two years there, too, when then-Captain Conway -- I think he had Kilo Company. So it's a good battalion. A lot of good leaders come from that battalion.

I going to ask you a two-part question. Both are about capabilities. One is -- (audio break) -- your billet there in Afghanistan and another one is more Marine-centric. I always ask this question because I like to get this insight, but are there any capabilities you wish you had or had more of? And the second question -- second part of this question concerns new Marine Corps efforts. I saw on the III-MEF webpage that in August, you put a call out for volunteers, and that III-MEF was doing all the training and pre-deployment work in-house for all those that volunteered to become trainers and advisors.

That leads me to this question. What are your thoughts on the new Marine Corps Training and Advisory Group that just stood up that'll be out at the Fort Story? You being there on the pointy end of the spear, any words of advice or what are your thoughts in general on the -- creating the centralized capability?

COL. SMITH: Okay, Dave, regarding the capability that you're asking, you're talking about as advisors or are you talking about on the Afghan side?

Q All I'm asking about's on your side as an advisor and a trainer.

COL. SMITH: Okay. Yes.

What additional capability would the advisors need to continue to function better? I think from what I've discovered, because of our -- the nature of the fight here being dispersed and being in the mountains, chasing small groups of folks, I think we would probably need to have some kind of light mortar capability to provide very rapid and timely and some accurate fires to get guys out of a pinch. I think that would be just one thing that -- if there were some embedded training teams in here talking with us, that would be one of the things that they would say that they would like to have as an added capability.

On the MCTAG -- I've kind of been here on the ground before this. I was also a member of the Marine Corps Capability Assessment Group a year-and-a-half ago. The MCTAG was a thought that we had then that we thought the Marine Corps needed to invest in. However, at the time it was very difficult to do from a manpower perspective and I'm glad to see that the Marine Corps has decided to do that. Just a couple of pieces of advice I would have for the MCTAG or anyone who thinks that they want to be or would like to be an advisor -

- being an advisor to Afghanistan Pacific-- and I'm sure that it's that that way with any nation that we provide advisors to -- is not for everyone. It takes a certain personality. It takes an ability to get along with people.

The Type As, I think, do not do well as advisors, for the post part. You have to be patient. You have to understand culture and the understanding of culture intellectually is one thing, but actually understanding the culture so that it has an impact -- so that it builds relationships -- effective relationships with your Afghan counterpart so that you can actually bring him into your confidence, so that he takes your advice and tries to implement it across the board. That'd be the one overall piece of advice I'd give. It's just -- advising is just not for everyone. It takes a little bit of -- a little bit of training and I think there's some selective choices on the part of the MCTAG to make sure that they get the right guys.

Q Thank you very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Christian.

Q Hi, Colonel Smith. It's Christian Lowe from Military.com.

COL. SMITH: Hi, Christian.

Q Could you give us an overall perspective on the enemy you face in your battle space right now? What are the engagements that you're fighting and how are you countering them? Give me a picture of what is happening there.

COL. SMITH: Okay.

First of all, you've got to realize that I'm not an operational commander. And while I have some access to the operational forces -- the collation forces and the enemy that they're fighting, my observation is going to be not necessarily from their perspective, but it's from an outside perspective, not having been on the ground as much as many of the coalition forces have been. But the nature of the fight in the central region is centered around Nuristan and Konar, and some of it in the Nangarhar Province. Taliban, Hig martyr forces and anti-coalition forces seemed to be coming together in small groups, and they seemed to be oriented against the coalition forces. There appears to be a natural tendency to gravitate towards Afghan security forces. There does not seem to be so much of a fight when Afghan national forces are in the lead and are trying to conduct operations and trying to convince the local people in these provinces that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is something that they need and want. And of course, the objective of the Taliban and the HIG is to dissuade -- to persuade the average Afghan citizen that the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is not something that they want to adhere to, and they try to establish their own small local district provincial shadow government and force the local people to adhere to that. So the fighting -- the actual fighting -- the physical fighting is against coalition forces. In our -- in my zone, I think it perhaps might be a little bit different than in other parts of the country. But it's small unit attacks. It's well-planned out ambushes across logistical main supply routes. It's planned attacks against combat outposts where coalition forces and, by the way, in most places in the Eastern Zone there's not a coalition force outpost that -- without Afghan National Army platoon company organizations with it.

But the Taliban, anti-coalition militia, they understand that if the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as represented by the Afghan National Security Forces makes its way into the Eastern Zone and convinces the people that the government can provide security, can provide governance, can provide economic improvement in their economic lifestyle, that the Taliban and the HIG and the AGM are on their way out.

Q Okay. So it's really -- it almost sounds like an outreach mission.

COL. SMITH: Yeah. That'd be a good way to describe it. In fact, the coalition force has to approach it like an outreach mission and it's an outreach that goes and stays. In order to be effective in countering the threats to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the ANSF -- the coalition force has to reach out and they have to stay in these villages so that they can provide permanent presence and permanent continued security.

Q Okay.

Jack, if I could, could I ask another quick question?

MR. HOLT: Sure.

Q Okay.

Colonel, Smith -- you know, you mentioned in your opening statement that you have several layers of command above you, around you, throughout your whole organization, et cetera and that those also are not just U.S. -- you know, purple folks, but they're also coalition folks. You mentioned French, Romanian, Germans, I think -- some others. To what extent has the policies of those countries that may have, you know, caveats on the activities of their advisors impacted your operations and your ability specifically to allow those trainers to embed with Afghan National Army forces that may be deployed somewhere where they have to fight, and that government may have caveats against getting into combat? How has that affected you? COL. SMITH: In my region, I have French operational liaison teams that are working with elements of my 1st Brigade -- or the 201st Corps 1st Brigade here. They are fully embedded. There is no impact there. The French have taken this mission completely on. They understand the importance of being embedded with the Afghan -- or Afghan Army, and I have seen little impact on our ability or the ability of the Afghan Army to perform in that particular case.

Not quite so with several of the other nations. I work with the Regional Command central, which is an international organization that changes between French commanders, Turkish commanders -- and they are responsible for providing some level of security in the Kabul region of the Central Zone. And they are -- they do have a few caveats and their organization can consist of Italians, Greeks, and some German. And they all come with, as you say, their different caveats and that does present a little bit of difficulty in getting out and integrating with and interacting with the local people. They typically -- the RC central organization typically does not imbed with Afghans, although we are working with them to try to get their operational capability to work with the 201st Corps elements here.

But that is something that's ongoing. Their caveats -- many of them have the caveats where they cannot leave combat outposts or the forward operating bases. I had a German team here who came with that caveat. They were

-- they came to train the Armor Battalion -- that they could not leave the FOB, they could not go out and conduct patrols with the tanks, so on and so forth. So just to give you an example of that, when we discovered that there was minimal training that they could provide the Armor Battalion, we took the Armor Battalion and made it a provisional infantry unit and it's out in the Eastern Zone right now. So there are ways around the different caveats. But they are and have provided a little bit of consternation. But we are able to work through those and pull as much of their capability in as we can.

Q Okay. And do you feel like you're getting the right amount of attention from -- you know, I don't know, your higher-ups, from -- you know, there's this notion that Afghanistan is the forgotten war and we're sort of letting it slip through our fingers. Do you feel forgotten?

COL. SMITH: No, absolutely not. There's enough support from -- at least in country, there's enough support that leads me to believe that we are not forgotten. I think the forgotten part of it is that the strategic and their political levels -- we understand that we're an economy of force fight over here. Everybody understands that and that makes everybody all the more confident in our own abilities to pull this thing through, because we think that this is a winnable fight and we believe in the Afghan people and what they're trying to do here.

Q Hey, can I follow up? We got time, Jack?

MR. HOLT: Yeah, sure. Go ahead.

Q Hey Colonel, Andrew again.

To follow up on Christian's question, what about being forgotten by American standards? What kind of -- other than -- you know, sporadic e-mails from guys like me, what are you getting there from other reporters and other people?

COL. SMITH: Well, you're right, Andy. From that perspective -- from what I can see, reading the newspapers and the occasional articles, from that perspective -- although I wouldn't say it's forgotten, I would think it's probably on the lower part of the screen. And I'm not sure what to do about that except that is typically the case when we have an economy of force mission, you don't want the attention on the Economy of Force mission, you want everybody's attention on the main effort which right now, I understand, is Iraq.

Q Okay, fair enough.

As far as the economy of force mission goes, who would you consider your major opponent? You've still got -- you've got the Taliban coming in from Pakistan and the local insurgents of -- or drug runners or a combination of both. Who do you see as the major problem?

COL. SMITH: I think it's a combination, Andrew. In our zone, HIG martyr guys in Nuristan and Taliban. I think there's probably a few al Qaeda guys sneaking across, but they are not fully ensconced here as is Taliban and HIG martyr groups.

Q Is there any cooperation -- any good cooperation from the Pakistani Army, or are they still more the foe than the friend?

COL. SMITH: Well, there has been good cooperation, specifically along the border, particularly in the Afghan military. They understand the significance of what it is that they must do along the border, as does the Afghan National Army. And we see them as good friends in this effort to close down the border.

Q Okay. You saw the report, I guess -- or maybe in today's New York Times, where SOCOM's going to start sending troops into Pakistan. That'll come out of your AO, you think, or it'll come out of where? COL. SMITH: I'm not sure. I don't think they'll come out of this AO, but they could. I just don't have that information at my fingertips, Andy.

Q Okay. If you haven't seen it, I'll send you the article out, if you like.

COL. SMITH: Sure, absolutely. Thanks.

Q Okay.

Okay, Dave, it's your turn.

Q Yeah, thanks.

You talked a little bit about the Afghani armor capabilities. Could you describe -- a little bit more detail the entire combined arms capability they have?

COL. SMITH: Yes.

To put it quite blunt, in those -- in the terms and in the frame of reference that Western armies used in creating combined arms capability, the Afghan Army does not possess it at this point. And that's one of our long-term objectives -- is to create an army that can create combined arms effects on the battlefield regardless of the types of weapons systems or organizations or equipment that they have. Like I said before, we consider them excellent individual and small unit fighters. But when it comes to providing neutral support for adjacent units, for sustaining long-term supplies and support so that units, artillery, tank can maintain contact with an organization that's an enemy and provide mutual support across the battlefield, they are just not there yet.

So they do not have a combined arms capability yet. We're on the way to not only fielding the equipment that will give them some of that capability, but also working with them at the tactical level so that their commanders and leaders understand unit tactics from platoon up to CANDAC and to Gates.

Q Is there any air support? Is it provided by the coalition or --

COL. SMITH: Yes. Right now, most of the air support that's needed when we have Afghans embedded with coalition forces are provided by coalition air as U.S. -- I think Canadians are here, the French are here with some air. So they do have that capability to plan for and work with coalition aviation. The Afghan Air Corps is getting stood up. I think you may have heard General Cullen here a month or so ago talk about the development of the Afghan Air Corps. They are ramping that up very rapidly. I only know that because I sent him a couple of briefs from the advisors that we're working with at the Air Corps, and they're working hard trying to buy helicopters and to get more



helicopters because that's really what's needed here in this country as far as aviation.

Q Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

Anything else?

Q No, I'm good.

I -- Colonel, this is great. I appreciate you getting up and doing this with us.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Colonel --

COL. SMITH: Absolutely.

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir.

Colonel Phillip Smith, the commander of the Afghan Regional Security Advisory Command -- Central. Thanks for joining us today for the Bloggers Roundtable. We do appreciate the -- we appreciate you coming on with us, sir.

COL. SMITH: Absolutely. It's been great. It's good to talk to you folks.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir. Hopefully we can talk again soon.

COL. SMITH: Absolutely. Any time.

END.